

Minutes

South La Crosse Transportation Study

Public Information Meeting

WisDOT Project ID 1644-08-00

Wednesday, March 30, 2005

4:30 p.m.

Southern Bluffs Elementary School, La Crosse, WI

Minutes by: Chuck Wade

Present: WisDOT – Beth Price, Dale Oestreich
LAPC – Tom Faella, Jackie Eastwood
City of La Crosse – Larry Kirch
SEH Inc. – Darren Fortney, Jim Hanson, Chuck Wade, Brian Smits, Heidi Schwarz
Bay Ridge Consulting – Nathan Guequierre
Public and local officials – Approximately 42 persons attended the meeting

Displays: Intersection alternatives (6), mainline alternatives (3), mainline intersection options (1), access management strategies (1), traffic forecasts, rural capacity forecasts, roadway types

Materials distributed: Project contacts sheet, comment form, mainline matrix, intersection matrix

Action items: A request was made for traffic counts at the three intersections south of the US 14/61/WIS 35 intersection and planned ROW for the future WIS 35 four-lane facility.

Meeting format:

1. Welcome and study overview

Darren Fortney and Jim Hanson presented project background information including the purpose and need, limits, timeline, traffic congestion, geometric deficiencies, and crash/safety.

2. Strategies and recommendations

Mainline strategies included the two-way-left-turn-lane alternative, the four-lane alternative, and the hybrid alternative. The mainline alternatives also included potential intersection options. The intersection alternatives for US 14/61/WIS 35 included a system approach of six alternatives that also included 33rd Street, Old Town Hall Road, Riverview Drive, and Sunnyside Drive.

3. Meeting wrap up

Upcoming study activities include reviewing and analyzing public comments, meeting with local officials in April, refining alternatives and determining cost estimates, formal local official meetings, public information meetings and writing the study report.

4. Comments

Questions were taken following the formal presentation. Comments from the question and answer period include:

- Is it premature to rule out the six-lane alternative? Wouldn't a six-lane facility eventually be needed anyway? Why not preserve a wide corridor now? Current traffic forecast information does not indicate the need for a six-lane facility in 2030. WisDOT indicated that in the years to come, if traffic increases dramatically, a six-lane facility alternative could be entertained at that time. Also, if property acquisition for the chosen alternative resulted in the ability to preserve a wider corridor, that option could also be looked at that time.
- Do traffic counts take into account the peak hour traffic? Yes.
- On the US 14/61 section, is the timing of a four-lane facility based solely on traffic counts? Traffic data will continue to be monitored. Traffic forecasts consider anticipated land use changes as well. It is also important to note that a four-lane facility with access management can, in many cases, operate more efficiently than a six-lane facility with no access management in place. Like water flowing through a pipe.
- A plan is on the shelf for a four-lane facility along US 14/61 and land has been acquired to preserve the plan as it becomes available. For example, the bridge replacement included a new structure with a life span of 75 years. The new structure was constructed and land acquired to accommodate the four-lane plan when it is implemented. One building was acquired to prevent future construction along the centerline of the proposed four-lane facility.
- Is there a recommended distance from a structure or roadway for safety reasons? Each situation is evaluated on a case-by-case basis; there is no set standard. Keep in mind a facility may be expanded on one side only to limit the need to acquire properties along both sides of a new roadway. These impacts are determined in later stages of design.
- When will WisDOT let local utilities know that a four-lane facility along US 14/61 will likely be in the long term? A press release should be issued.
- Who takes responsibility for a loss in value of a property as a result of roadway encroachment? Again, determined on a case-by-case basis during the environmental study process. WisDOT needs to look at the overall need of the community when it balances impacts. Keep in mind these improvements would likely occur 20 to 30 years into the future.
- Is WisDOT coordinating with the City of La Crosse regarding a north/south corridor? WisDOT is using the MPO's projections. A north/south corridor would likely have a minimal effect on US 14/61/WIS 35 traffic in this area.
- What are the short-term plans, not just 20-30 years from now? The study recommends short-term strategies. WIS 35 construction is tentatively planned for 2010.
- What happens to the plans if a large traffic generator such as Trane leaves the City of La Crosse? It would not change the overall plan, but traffic counts are generally taken every three years and elements of the plan can adapt to the changing corridor.

Comments from the open house session include:

- Many individuals were in favor of the sidewalk system through the US 14/61/WIS 35 intersection.
- A few individuals thought keeping the TWLTL on the south end of the corridor would be most appropriate.
- Bike accommodations need to be made through the South Avenue/East Avenue intersection.
- Short-cutting through Kwik-Trip lot south of Wal-Mart is pretty common for the neighborhood to the south because you can't get onto Mormon Coulee Road at Marion Road. A lot of people from the neighborhood use this method.
- Can a merge lane be considered from Sunnyside Drive to allow vehicles to get up to speed heading northbound?
- Can Sunnyside Road be moved to the south of the school to accommodate traffic and provide greater separation from the US 14/61/WIS 35 intersection?
- One person could see closing off access to Old Town Hall Road and Ridgeview Road from WIS 35, but felt access onto WIS 35 still was needed. This was because of the competition of vehicles with busses and school traffic at Sunnyside Drive.

Comment forms were provided. Comments from the comment forms included:

Q1: Thoughts on the draft mainline alternatives:

- If U-turns are allowed, the 4-lane variable-width median is best, because of its pedestrian friendliness.
- 5-lane TWLTL, but consolidate some of the business driveways.
- South Avenue to 33rd Street should be the 5-lane TWLTL. The Highway 14 segment should be 4-lane divided with limited access and access roads on both sides. Preserve right-of-way for a potential 6-lane divided roadway. The Highway 35 segment should be a 4-lane divided, limited access roadway with access roads where possible. Preserve right-of-way for a future 6-lane roadway and a sidewalk/path to the County K intersection.

Q2: Thoughts on the draft intersection alternatives:

- Roundabout looks good on the "big intersection" but it's a temporary fix that will eventually have to give way to an interchange, I would guess.
- I like #5 but open access to 33rd Street and bank to turn left (or South). Maybe 5 lanes in that area like it is.
- Alternative #5, but with full access at Sunnyside Drive and 33rd Street. I do not like roundabouts. Speeds are too high to make them work at this location (maybe in a 25 mph zone), but not at this intersection. Insure the city of La Crosse receives recommendation for secondary roads north/south and east/west of the intersection.
- Insufficient studies on total traffic using Riverview Drive and especially Old Town Hall Road have been done to convert both to Cul-de-Sac's, putting all of the traffic on Sunnyside Drive, causing heavy traffic through residential neighborhoods. In addition, use of old aerial maps does not show all developed property to the north of Old Town Hall Road (developed in 2003 and 2004). Very few accidents have occurred at the intersections of Old Town Hall Road and WIS 35. No need to remove access.

Q3: Thoughts about potential access management strategies:

- Yes, definitely combine some of the driveways!
- Consolidate driveways.
- Change the speed limit from 40 mph to 35 mph to reduce severity of rear end collisions. Purchase access from as many properties as possible, to reduce access.
- I'm making a suggestion to let all three roads open for going out, and Riverview Drive as right-in/right-out. Leave Sunnyside Drive as is. Close Old Town Hall Road entrance. Another thought – you could block these off before and see what kind of impact it would have. Is it possible to put a light at the intersection and not do these changes at all?

Additional comments:

- We need to enhance infrastructure for pedestrian and bicycle traffic.
- Highway 14/61 and Bloomers Mill Road/Charlie's intersection needs to change. Visibility from La Crosse is limited. If nothing else, clear back the tree by Bean's or that cemetery so a clear view of that bend is made.
- Reduce speed limit from Ward Avenue to Sunnyside Drive along South Avenue – Mormon Coulee Road – Highway 35 to 35 mph. Install contiguous sidewalks (both sides), located at least 5 feet behind the curb. Move poles, signage, etc. behind the sidewalk for South Avenue – Mormon Coulee Road – Highway 35. Green space is generally not well maintained along roadways by the city or county. Please consider long-term maintenance of green space and avoid these. They usually turn into a weed infested mess after two or three years.
- Use of a signal at both 33rd Street and US 14/61/WIS 35 intersection would cause the least amount of adjustment and resolve the traffic issues at those points. The alternatives appear to be based on old data or incomplete data as to traffic use at the Sunnyside/Riverview/Old Town Hall Road intersections. Use of roundabouts may be o.k. for cars, but the extensive number of semis using these intersections could cause more trouble than currently occurs.
- Almost anything would be better than what we have. Stoplights at WIS 35 would be good, but I don't understand how WisDOT can talk 20 to 30 years in the future when it needs to be fixed in 20 years. Traffic will be so bad; none of your plans will work.